

## **NJ LAWMAKERS FOUGHT TO KEEP COMMISSARY OPEN FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY AND THEIR FAMILIES**

(Newark, NJ) – U.S. Senators Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Representatives Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ-6) and Rush Holt (D-NJ-12), today slammed the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) for its decision to close the Fort Monmouth commissary when the base closes next month. Since 2010, the lawmakers have advocated for DOD to keep the commissary open to continue serving 19,000 service members, surviving spouses, military retirees and their families who the Army had estimated would continue to utilize the commissary after the base closes.

“Since the Bush Administration recommended closing Fort Monmouth, we have worked together to fight this misguided closure, and most recently to keep the commissary open. We are deeply disturbed by the Pentagon’s decision. Closing the commissary is the wrong decision and it adds insult to injury for military families in the region,” said Senator Lautenberg, an Army veteran. “The commissary is a critical resource for military families and this will only serve to heighten the impact of the base closure. We will continue to do everything in our power to support the military retirees and their families who have already sacrificed so much.”

“I am incredibly disappointed that the Pentagon has chosen to ignore the Army’s recommendation and close the Fort Monmouth commissary,” Senator Menendez said. “Thousands of military families and veterans will now be faced with a sudden lack of access to the affordable food and basic goods they need. The Department of Defense should have at the very least kept the commissary open long enough to enable families to adjust to this change, as we’ve been advocating for over a year. It is the right thing to do on behalf of those who sacrifice so much on behalf of our country.”

“The Department of Defense made the wrong decision to close the Commissary, one that ignores the needs of our military families and the effects this will have on the local economy,” Rep. Pallone said. “The reality of this misguided plan is that it will make it more difficult for active duty and retired military personnel to receive the benefits they have fairly earned. It’s in everyone’s best interest for our military families to continue to utilize the Commissary, which is why I am extremely disappointed in this decision.”

“It is inexplicable and alarming that the Pentagon has, against the recommendation of the Secretary of the Army and senior Congressional leaders, decided to close Fort Monmouth’s commissary,” Rep. Holt said. “The 19,000 service members, military retirees, and their dependents who rely on the commissary were right to expect that this critical resource would remain open. In spite of the Pentagon’s wrong-headed decision, we will do everything possible to help Monmouth’s service members and retirees and to support the community’s economy.”

In 2005, the Bush Administration recommended the closure of Fort Monmouth to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. The recommendation was accepted by the BRAC Commission and the base is now scheduled to shut down in September 2011.

The Senators and Congressmen have sent letters and had multiple meetings and calls to urge the Department of Defense to keep the commissary open. The delegation met with Army Secretary John McHugh in May 2010 to personally request the commissary remain open for a transitional two-year period after Fort Monmouth closes. In August 2010, the lawmakers sent a letter to Army Secretary McHugh to reiterate their stance that the commissary is vital for military retirees and their families across the state. In response to the lawmakers' request, Secretary McHugh recommended in February 2011 that the commissary remain open for a transitional two-year period following Fort Monmouth's closure.

In addition, the Senators and Congressmen met with Dr. Clifford Stanley, UnderSecretary of Personnel and Readiness at the Department of Defense, who is responsible for military commissaries, in June to underscore the value of the Fort Monmouth Commissary and request that it remain open. In a letter leading up to their meeting with Under Secretary Stanley, the lawmakers laid out significant concerns about the process and guidelines for deciding which commissaries would be closed.